

LETTER VII

Dear friend,

The sophisms which we have dealt with aim to establish in principle that material independence is not necessary for the Church, and that poverty suits it better than wealth. From the particular we move on to the general. It is claimed to prove that the current Pope must abandon the provinces invaded by the Revolution. For this, we cite the example of Pius VI.

The choice was not a happy one. It was precisely because he had before him the experience of his venerable predecessor that Pius IX was to give nothing away. After signing the Treaty of Tolentino, did Pius VI keep the rest of his States? Did the cession he thought he could make to brute force prevent him from being driven out of Rome and Italy a few months later, from being deprived of his freedom and from dying in prison? You must agree that knowing **that** outcome is very encouraging for Pius IX.

Moreover, circumstances are no longer the same. At the time of Pius VI, the Revolution had not yet clearly said its last word. It was possible to misunderstand its plans and believe that it would be content with a partial usurpation. Today, such an illusion is no longer possible. **The Revolution doesn't just want part of St. Peter's estate, it wants all of it.**

Furthermore, the eminent Cardinal Antonelli rightly points out that Pius VI was robbed by violence, and that Pius IX is being asked to abdicate. However, no pope has ever abdicated: he cannot, nor must. "If therefore," he adds, "we consider the difference in the cases, we will easily see that the same motive which induced Pius VI to yield, obliges Pius IX to an absolute refusal.

"Pius VI, in circumstances completely different from the present, was faced with **insurmountable violence and material force**. Pius IX, on the other hand, was faced with a principle that people wanted to make prevail. But material

force is only a fact. By its very nature, it is limited and only makes itself felt within the circle of its action, which it cannot or will not go beyond. The same cannot be said of **principles**. By their very nature, they are universal and inexhaustibly fruitful. They do not stop at the point to which we wish to restrict their action, but tend towards a general application.

Thus Pius VI, by yielding to material force, could reasonably hope to save the rest of his States, whereas Pius IX, **yielding to a supposed principle, would virtually abdicate the sovereignty of all his States, and authorize a spoliation against every principle of justice and reason.** By this we can see that the example of Pius VI leads rather to a conclusion quite opposite to the one we have in view."²⁵

You can now appreciate this new sophism (fallacy) about which so much noise has been made; but of this and all others of the same kind, more complete justice must be done in favor of Catholics.

Now, regardless of all the reasons given, the very interest of society, threatened by pagan communism, made it Pius IX's particular duty not to sanction anything dared against his temporal domain.

IN DEFENDING HIS RIGHT, THE POPE DEFENDS ALL RIGHTS.

This is the point on which the question must be maintained. In passing, to the shame of certain Catholics, higher or lower on the social ladder, the Protestants of Mecklenburg, in their address to Pius IX, have very well understood and nobly expressed this point.

We have already seen that in defending his independence, the Holy Father defends freedom. It remains to show that he is defending authority, property, all goods, all rights, society itself, and this against barbarism. I have no other word

²⁵ Dispatch of February 29, 1860, in response to the circular from Mr. Thouvenel, Minister of Foreign Affairs of France.

for what threatens us. If the one I use is too strong, you'll soften it; but before you start looking for a synonym, listen to me.

You must admit, dear friend, that we are witnessing a strange spectacle. What is happening before our very eyes? Two opposing forces are at war: the Revolution and Catholicism. What does the Revolution want? To inaugurate its right. And what right is that? It is the right of man reigning without dependence on, or control by, the authority of God; in other words, it is the right of force. What is the inauguration of the right of force? It is the triumph of barbarism; for the same law governs savages and wolves.

Now look where we are. Under heaven, only one man is defending true law, the law of justice, against revolutionary law. To safeguard it, he devotes himself to outrage, persecution, poverty, perhaps martyrdom. His cause is the cause of all, the cause of civilization. Doesn't it seem that the whole of Europe should rally around him and support him heroically with the triple power of its prayers, its gold and its blood?

Well, not only are we abandoning him, but far from acknowledging his invincible energy, you hear millions of men of every country, state and rank blaming his conduct, taunting him with obstinacy, blindness and worldly ambition. This is the way to reduce the highest social question to the petty proportions of a vile interest. May God forgive them, for they know not what they say!

They don't know that in defending Christian law against revolutionary law, the heroic Pius IX is defending order against disorder, authority against anarchy, property against socialism, civilization against barbarism; the nobleman's castle, the banker's safe, the merchant's store, the worker's savings bank, the plowman's field, as well as the throne of kings, even that of Victor-Emmanuel. **All rights are upheld.** The palace and the thatched cottage rest on the same foundation. The fire has no preference: with the same flight it consumes the rich districts and the suburbs.

Let it be recognized in principle, that if one can, under the pretext of national convenience or utility, expropriate, in defiance of all rights and all existing treaties, any prince, even if he is a pope: before long not one throne will not remain standing. Even more so, no owner is safe. The principle that you invoke today against the Sovereign Pontiff, and that you claim to make him sanction, tomorrow this pitiless logic of democracy will turn against you: what will you have to say?

That's what people don't want to understand: I should say what **we can no longer understand**. Indeed, such is the impotence of logic and the weakening of common sense, even among a large number of honest people, that these elementary ideas pass twenty cubits above their heads. **Among all the symptoms of the evil to which Europe is prey, I know of none more alarming than this weakness or perversity of the intelligences.**

When you see a man groping in the middle of the day, mistaking cars for doors, calling white what is black, you say that man is struck by vertigo or dementia. When I see a world giving me the same spectacle, how can I not say that it is on the borders of barbarism? What is madness for the individual is barbarism for peoples.

Be that as it may, for those who retain the ability to link two ideas, **the fall of St. Peter's temporal throne is, in the social order, the uncertainty of all rights, the shaking of all thrones, and the signal for a general meltdown.** In the religious order, **for the Church, it means entering the most difficult phase of its existence, perhaps the return to the catacombs.** For the nations that condemn their mother to this harsh ordeal, it's the beginning of an unknown future, one that even the most steadfast eyes dare not contemplate.

Whatever the authors and approvers of the spoliation may say, this fact, which is being reduced to petty proportions, is fraught with immense events that will shake Europe to its foundations. We'll come back to this later. In the

meantime, I must speak to you of more immediate dangers. The practical purpose of my letters demands it: **these new dangers are schism and persecution.**

All yours.